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To: Governor's Advisory Council on School Funding

From: Madalyn Quinlan, Chief of Staff

Date: September 4, 2001

Subject: Comparison of Enrollment, Student/Staffing Ratios and Cost per Student among School Size Categories using 1999-2000 Data

The attached spreadsheets provide a comparison of district enrollment, student/staff ratios, and cost per student by district size category. For its analysis for the *Montana Statewide Education Profile*, the Office of Public Instruction has used six groupings of elementary districts, five groupings of high school districts, and two groupings of K-12 districts for comparison purposes in looking at the delivery of educational services and costs. These same groupings are used in this analysis.

### Observations from Analysis:

#### Elementary Districts

- There are 287 elementary districts.
- 96% of the students enrolled in elementary districts are in the 109 districts that have more than 150 students.
- 4% of the students enrolled in elementary districts are in the 178 districts with 150 or fewer students.
- Student/teacher ratios are directly proportional to the size of the elementary district. The average student/teacher ratio for the six elementary size categories ranges from 8.7 for the smallest elementary districts to 17.3 for the largest elementary districts.
- The cost of transportation, building operation and maintenance, and bonds and facilities is inversely proportional to district size. The cost per student for these expenditures decreases as district size increases.
- The smallest elementary districts (6E) deliver the total package of educational services to students through the classroom teacher. These districts are characterized by the lowest student/teacher ratios of 8.7 students per teacher.
- Elementary districts with 41-150 students (5E) are characterized by low student/teacher ratios and the lowest student /staff ratios for principals and librarians. These districts tend to have higher student/staff ratios for superintendents and counselors than the elementary districts with 151-400 students (4E).

- Students in the elementary districts with more than 2500 students (1E) have better access (in terms of staffing) to the services provided by librarians, program coordinators, and psychologists than students in districts with 851-2500 students (2E).
- The combined expenditure per student of instruction and student services ranges from \$3,757 to \$4,227 (\$470 spread) among the six elementary size categories. This combined expenditure reflects what is typically considered direct services to students. Among the elementary districts with 150 or fewer students (5E and 6E) and the elementary districts with more than 850 students (1E and 2E), the combined expenditure per student for instruction and student services is roughly equivalent, ranging from \$3,934 to \$3,997.

### **High School Districts**

- There are 120 high school districts.
- 95% of the students enrolled in high school districts are in the 41 districts that have more than 200 students.
- 5% of the students enrolled in high school districts are in the 79 districts with less than 200 students.
- Student/teacher ratios are directly proportional to the size of the high school district. The average student/teacher ratio for the five high school size categories ranges from 6.3 for the smallest high school districts to 17.2 for the largest high school districts.
- The cost of transportation, building operation and maintenance, and bonds and facilities is inversely proportional to district size. The cost per student for these expenditures decreases as district size increases.
- The student/staff ratios for teachers, superintendents, principals, counselors, librarians increase directly with high school district size. As the district size increases, the student/staff ratios for these FTE categories also increase.
- Students in the high school districts with more than 1250 students (1H) have better access (in terms of staffing) to the services provided by program coordinators and psychologists than students in smaller high school districts.
- The combined expenditure per student of instruction and student services ranges from \$3,823 to \$6,181 (\$2,358 spread) among the five high school size categories. This combined expenditure reflects what is typically considered direct services to students. This combined expenditures is on a declining cost curve as school district size increases until school district size reaches 1250 students or more. For the largest high school category (1H), the combined expenditure per student increases compared to the next smallest group (2H).

### **K-12 Districts**

- K-12 districts enroll 12% of the total K-12 public school population.
- The expenditures within the two K12 district size categories fall within the mid-range of elementary and high school program expenditures.